Library of Walls: The Library of Congress and the Contradictions of Information Society by Samuel Gerald Collins. Duluth, MN: Litwin Books, 2009. 216 pp. ISBN 978-0-9802004-2-3.

Samuel Gerald Collins' book *Library of Walls: The Library of Congress and the Contradictions of Information Society* seeks to address the issues of a present, defined by its future that does not yet exist. Collins speaks to the physicality of the structure of the library itself, opened up for debate in a society where "the neoliberal fairytale of liberty through consumerism" surfaces in contradictory trends within American culture (p. ix). Deconstructing a paradigm is not a literary technique that is often used by many writers to problematize the issues to which there is no immediate answer. However, *Library of Walls* as a work is more than just simplistic deconstruction and directed critique of the existing norms that define what a library is, was, and will be through the prism of American culture; it is an innovative "symphonic" blend of ideas that originated in theories of knowledge, information society, and cultural anthropology.

The logic by which the chapters are arranged, whereby one preceding theme gives way to other evolving ideas that in turn are meant to juxtapose authorial ideas against the reader's interpretation, makes it possible to read these chapters out of succession and independent of each other. The information that is provided by the author in these chapters can be read as a freestanding critique of the current state in which our "information" society exists. The book begins with a critical review of the trajectory of the Library of Congress as an information institution since its inception. The brief repose that examines the priorities of the Library as a symbolic apparatus forces us to rethink the idea that a physical institution like the Library can also exist as an archival repository of knowledge within the framework of the system in which it exists. It forces us to understand the spatial catastasis that is reflected in the physicality of the Library of Congress. The author further suggests that the Library of Congress manifests itself as "a series of contradictions in the 'practical relationship' of spaces, things and people. But this is less of an effect of epiphenomenal resistance than the 'normal' operations of institution" (p. 38). If the catastasis heightens the intrigue and sets up the reader's expectations for the next chapter, then typically the next chapter should have an element of "catastrophe." The question that the author poses to his readers is an interesting contradiction to the perception of space in the "information society and the world it creates."

Is the crisis of space really a crisis of knowledge? Or is it simply the storage of knowledge and access to it in a way that is correlated to the available space? What about the built-in capacity of an information system to condense the required knowledge and then depressurize it and allow it to mushroom on the fly? Here the author does not take into consideration the externalities that could

precipitate the similar crisis in any other information society. Is the conversion of the library as a physical space to definable non-space a definitive trend that is unleashed by technology alone? The space that the author studies here is the Library of Congress, but can the analogies that the author makes be conducive to elucidation of the generalizable results that can be universally valid at the other locations? These are some of the questions left for the readers to ponder. The catastasis the author portrays is the function of the questions that it investigates.

The author traces the history of complex information objects such as MARC records, which is extremely useful to the Library and Information Studies field. The author critically examines the consultative management technique and its success and failure at the Library through evaluation of the process of "securing the collections." The book does not go into great detail regarding how the Library has been only partially successful in safe-guarding the books it collects and acquires, and the author also informs us that there has not been a complete inventory of the all of the books that are in the holdings of the Library since the addition of the Jeffersonian collection in 1815 (p. 132). Does that mean the claim that the information wants to be free can be cynically analyzed through the lens of a book that has been missing in action on many library shelves? Or should we invoke Indian librarian S.R. Ranganathan in saying that a book is for its user? The question of theft and inventory control could have been explored a bit further.

In conclusion, the author takes the reader to the present, which is embedded not in the idealistic notions of information society, but in the multi-factorial engagement politics, cultural limitations that are laced with "egregious racism" (p. 145). Has the information society as it exists today in our country become representative of "information pastoralism," where the consumption of information and the patterns by which the information is packaged and marketed in the long run might turn into negative adjustments by which the historically progressive mission statements are limited?

Reviewer

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